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17TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

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January 19, 2006

The Honorable Jeff Denham
California State Capitol
Room 3076
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear State Senator Denham:

In light of the misinformation that characterized last week's hearing regarding the establishment of a veterans cemetery at the former Fort Ord, I would like to clarify the record for your and the public's benefit.

You may recall from previous conversations between our staffs that I authored the language directing the VA to prepare a report on what is necessary for the VA to establish a cemetery at Fort Ord. Because your press release contains incorrect information about the report language, I am including the exact language in the text of this letter so you will be better prepared next time you cite it.

Fort Ord, California.---The Committee is concerned that land located at Fort Ord, California and set-aside for a cemetery is not being used for that purpose due to established policies that may not have adequately considered situations that exist at Fort Ord. The Committee directs the Secretary and the Undersecretary for Memorial Affairs to examine the unique situation at Fort Ord and report back to the Committee by January 16, 2006 on what is necessary for the Department to make use of this site. H.Rept. 109-95.

The report language is very precise and does not direct the VA to examine the possibility of establishing a "national cemetery" or making a cemetery at Fort Ord "an annex of the existing cemetery at Santa Nella," as your press release indicated. As elected public officials, we have an obligation to inform the public as accurately as possible. I am aware that your office was provided with the report language last spring so I am puzzled by your deliberate and misleading public pronouncement.

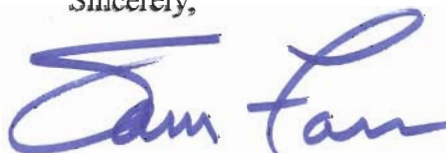
As you may be aware, current federal precedent to annex a National Cemetery is only an option if the National Cemetery is at full capacity for burials. Since the San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery is brand new, it will be more than several decades before it is closed. Moreover, current federal precedent mandates close proximity to the original National Cemetery. For these two reasons, it is unlikely Fort Ord would be considered as an annex to either San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery or the Golden Gate National Cemetery.

As this process moves forward, the federal VA will be a partner in creating a cemetery at Fort Ord, and Bill Jayne, the Acting Director of Construction Management, will be a key player. My staff has spoken directly to Mr. Jayne, who advised that he spoke to Tom Johnson, the California State VA Secretary as well as a staffer on the Veterans Affairs Committee before the hearing to let them know a change in his schedule was going to prevent him from attending your hearing. Given that he contacted appropriate California officials that he was not going to be able to attend, I thought the press reports citing his absence were purposely derogatory and unnecessarily inflammatory.

It is my understanding this hearing was previously scheduled in December; however no courtesy of a notice was provided to my office about the hearing. In fact, my staff learned of it only during your presentation to the Monterey County Board of Supervisors in December and approached your staff with questions. Likewise, no advance notice of the January meeting was provided to me. My office learned of it only after your January 6 press release arrived in the mail on January 9, a mere three days before the hearing. Clearly, the cemetery is a cooperative federal-state project. It follows therefore that the federal representative from the area be notified in a timely manner about pertinent public hearings. The priorities of everyone involved in this endeavor should place the goal of realizing a veterans cemetery above all else. In the future, I hope you will encourage your staff to contact my District Director, Alec Arago (831-424-2229) about any issues or questions relating to the establishment of a cemetery at Fort Ord.

Finally, I must comment on the bill you recently introduced in the State Senate, Senate Joint Resolution 18. Given the true facts of the National Cemetery and State Veterans Cemetery programs and their associated criteria, your bill does little to advance the cause of establishing a veterans cemetery at Fort Ord. I am disappointed in SJR 18 because it only further lends confusion to an already complicated issue. I would hope you would reconsider and withdraw the bill so we can instead work toward a real plan to make a veterans cemetery at Fort Ord a reality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sam Farr". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sam" and last name "Farr" clearly distinguishable.

SAM FARR
Member of Congress